



PANHANDLE

BENEWAH, BONNER, BOUNDARY, KOOTENAI, & SHOSHONE COUNTIES

LABOR FORCE & EMPLOYMENT

The Panhandle Labor Market Area unemployment rate fell from 8.9 percent in November 2000 to 8.4 percent in December 2000. An early start to winter pushed the unemployment rate up in November, when many construction, transportation, logging, and other outdoor workers were laid off a month earlier than normal. Despite the snow and slush at lower elevations, November did not bring enough snow to the ski slopes and the winter ski season did not start by Thanksgiving. The late start held back normal November job surges at ski areas, hotels, restaurants, and stores in the Sandpoint and Kellogg areas.

Despite the drop from November to December 2000, the unemployment rate was considerably higher than in December 1999. The higher unemployment rate primarily resulted from job losses in the *Lumber & Wood Products* industry in the second half of 2000.

January and February brought more snow to area ski resorts and snowmobile trails, bringing more visitors to winter attractions. Schweitzer's new chairlift helped it break last year's record attendance, while Silver Mountain now believes that it probably will host the same number of skiers this season as in the previous year.

AREA DEVELOPMENTS

Bonner County

- RailQuest America recently purchased Montana Rockies Rail Tour. RailQuest plans to keep the six-year-old venture in Sandpoint; the previous owner was considering moving it to Portland, Oregon. RailQuest offers four train tours to Glacier Park, Yellowstone Park, the Grand Tetons, and from Sandpoint to Livingston, Montana. The train tours entertain 2,000 passengers a year. The train cars, including the locomotive, dining car, and domed observation cars, are vintage cars from the 1940s and 1950s. RailQuest

Panhandle Table 1: Labor Force & Employment

	Dec 2000*	Nov 2000	Dec 1999	% Change From	
				Last Month	Last Year
INDIVIDUALS BY PLACE OF RESIDENCE					
Seasonally Adjusted					
Civilian Labor Force	90,580	92,650	89,090	-2.2	1.7
Unemployed	7,590	8,250	6,180	-8.0	22.8
% of Labor Force Unemployed	8.4	8.9	6.9		
Total Employment	82,990	84,400	82,910	-1.7	0.1
Unadjusted					
Civilian Labor Force	91,290	92,800	89,760	-1.6	1.7
Unemployed	8,200	7,370	6,800	11.3	20.6
% of Labor Force Unemployed	9.0%	7.9%	7.6%		
Total Employment	83,090	85,430	82,960	-2.7	0.2
JOBS BY PLACE OF WORK					
Nonfarm Payroll Jobs**	67,210	67,810	65,710	-0.9	2.3
Goods-Producing Industries	14,630	15,070	14,820	-2.9	-1.3
Mining	980	990	1,000	-1.0	-2.0
Construction	4,830	5,200	4,830	-7.1	0.0
Manufacturing	8,820	8,880	8,990	-0.7	-1.9
Lumber & Wood Products	4,170	4,220	4,600	-1.2	-9.3
All Other Manufacturing	4,650	4,660	4,390	-0.2	5.9
Service-Producing Industries	52,580	52,740	50,890	-0.3	3.3
Transportation	1,530	1,530	1,480	0.0	3.4
Communication & Utilities	1,070	1,070	1,030	0.0	3.9
Wholesale Trade	2,310	2,280	2,240	1.3	3.1
Retail Trade	15,610	15,740	15,490	-0.8	0.8
Finance, Insurance & Real Estate	2,530	2,460	2,500	2.8	1.2
Service & Miscellaneous	16,310	16,240	15,380	0.4	6.0
Government Administration	7,710	7,920	7,470	-2.7	3.2
Government Education	5,510	5,500	5,300	0.2	4.0

* Preliminary estimate

**Full- or part-time jobs of people who worked for or received wages in the pay period including the 12th of the month

employs eight people year-round and an additional seventeen people in the summer.

- The Sandpoint Elks recently opened the new \$650,000 6,600-square foot clubhouse at their nine-hole golf course on State Highway 200 east of Sandpoint. The Elks will use the clubhouse—which includes a restaurant, bar, banquet and conference room, and pro shop—as their lodge. The Elks Building in downtown Sandpoint has been sold and converted into offices.
- Harbor Resorts, owner of Schweitzer Mountain Resort, plans to develop White Pine Lodge, a \$15 million development of 48 condominiums, fitness center, sauna, and retail space. Construction is scheduled to start in April and end by early 2002. White Pine Lodge is the beginning of a pedestrian plaza of retail and condo space called Schweitzer Village. The 10-year plan calls for adding at least one building to Schweitzer Village each year. Harbor Resort plans to turn Schweitzer into a year-round destination resort, so it is working with Hidden Lakes Golf Course on joint marketing for the summer tourist season.

Kootenai County

- The University of Idaho Research Park in Post Falls recently signed up two new tenants—Questal Technologies and Quantum Lighting LLC. Questal, a Canadian manufacturer of energy-saving lighting system regulators, will open a laboratory for research, software development, and quality assurance. About five people will work in the Questal lab. Quantum, Questal's Spokane-based distributor, expects to employ seven people at its Post Falls sales office.
- Leone & Keeble, of Spokane, will begin construction this May on a \$4.9 million residence hall on the North Idaho College (NIC) campus in Coeur d'Alene. The residence hall will be built in an L-shape around the old Fort Sherman officers' quarters, which now are faculty offices. Currently, the community college has no on-campus housing. The new residence hall will provide space for 200 students. The hall also will allow NIC to host special summer programs that could bring hundreds of visitors each year. When it opens at the beginning of 2002, NIC will hire people for administrative, custodial, and food service positions. NIC already employs about 900 people.
- ESES Bistro recently opened at the Mullan Plaza across from Quad Park in Post Falls. The new restaurant serves international cuisine and wines in a casual atmosphere.
- Rathdrum's rapid population growth attracted three new businesses—Perfection Tire & Automotive Repair, Prairie Animal Hospital, and Interstate Office Supply. They soon will move into new buildings under construction at the 27-acre Park Wood Plaza, anchored by Super 1 Foods.
- The Fourth Street Trading Company is a cooperative formed by the Fourth Street Loft, Antique Windows, Canary Cottage, Chrysalis Home, J.J. Antiques, Marilyn Fisher Art, Heart's Desire Studio, River City Stained Glass, Divine Designs, Season's Beauty, Val's Whimsy, and Vintage Bliss. The cooperative members recently moved into a 6,000-square foot space in the old Roxy Theater at 115 S. Fourth Street in downtown Coeur d'Alene. Independently owned businesses, the cooperative members share overhead, cash registers, and some advertising. Jointly, they offer clothing, linens, pillows, antiques, stained-glass windows, handcrafted gifts, paintings, and furniture.
- Stimson Lumber purchased Idaho Forest Industries (IFI) in November. The Richards family owned the Coeur d'Alene-based IFI for 80 years. At the time of the purchase, IFI operated two mills in Coeur d'Alene and a mill in Priest River, and owned 89,000 acres of timberland in North Idaho. IFI employed 450 people. Stimson—which owns mills in Oregon, Washington, Mon-

tana, and California—kept all of IFI's mill workers, but laid-off a few people at IFI's headquarters because of duplication.

Shoshone County

The Silver Valley received a devastating blow when the 117-year-old Sunshine Mine closed on February 16.

Silver prices hovering below \$4.60 per ounce already had caused the silver mine at Big Creek to reduce its workforce from 230 employees in June 2000 to 170 employees by January 2001. In early February, Sunshine received word of the imminent closure of the smelter where it sent its silver concentrate, the Asarco smelter in East Helena, Montana. Sunshine was not able to find another smelter that would take its silver concentrate at an economical rate.

When the mine shut down February 16, more than 130 miners immediately lost their jobs. Approximately 35 people will remain working for three months, while they put the mine on care-and-maintenance status. Care-and-maintenance status will allow the mine to re-open quickly, if silver prices rise significantly.

Now that Sunshine is closed, only two mines remain open in the historic Silver Valley. Hecla Mining's Lucky Friday Mine near Mullan and Coeur Silver Valley Resource's Galena Mine near Wallace employ more than 200 people each.

Following the Sunshine shutdown, Shoshone County's *Mining* employment fell to an estimated 540 jobs, its lowest level since early 1996, and 26 percent less than March 2000.

Kellogg Job Service is providing job search, relocation, and job training assistance to Sunshine miners. Miners will find it difficult to find comparable high-paying jobs in Shoshone County, whose unemployment rate before the closure already hovered around 10 percent. The average annual wage paid by Shoshone County's mining sector in 1999 was \$38,541, while the average annual wage paid by all other sectors was \$21,559.

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